

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA)

STATEMENT OF

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and

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On

"Snow Disasters for Local, State and Federal Governments in the National Capital Region: Response and Recovery Partnerships with FEMA"

BEFORE THE

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MANAGEMENT  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Norton, Ranking Member Diaz-Balart, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

I am Patricia Arcuri, Acting Regional Administrator for the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region III office. I am joined today by Mr. Steward Beckham, Director for FEMA's Office of National Capital Region Coordination (NCRC).

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to discuss the recent snow disasters in the National Capital Region (NCR) and how they have informed FEMA's coordination and support of the NCR for all hazards.

I would like to begin with a brief overview of Region III and my role as the Acting Regional Administrator.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION REGION III**

As the Acting Regional Administrator, I oversee and coordinate FEMA's all-hazards preparedness and emergency management efforts in Delaware, the District of Columbia (the District), Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. These efforts include development, implementation and execution of FEMA's programs and initiatives. None of these programs and initiatives can be successful without a strong emergency preparedness and response team consisting of federal, state, and local government; volunteer and faith-based groups; the business community; and of course, the general public. I'm pleased to say that ours is a strong, capable, and responsive Region.

We work in conjunction with the FEMA Headquarters' NCRC Office to ensure seamless collaboration with the NCR; to understand and to respond to the unique challenges faced in the NCR; and to anticipate resource and information needs leading up to, during, and following a disaster event.

### **Office of National Capital Region Coordination**

The NCRC was created by the Homeland Security Act of 2002, section 882, to coordinate federal programs and relationships with state, local and regional authorities in the NCR. The NCRC was transferred to FEMA in 2007 with other preparedness elements as part of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA) reorganization.

The NCRC's activities contribute to FEMA's broader efforts to improve and maintain relationships with state and local partners in order to work as a coordinated team in the event of a natural disaster or terrorist attack in the NCR.

### **Preparedness Activities**

Governors, or the Mayor in the District, after consulting with local government officials, may determine that federal assistance is required if response needs exceed the capacity of the combined resources of the local and state (or District) government. To request federal assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, the Governor or DC Mayor must: certify that the severity and magnitude of the disaster exceed District/state and local capabilities; certify that federal assistance is necessary to supplement the efforts and available resources of the District/state and local governments, disaster relief organizations, and compensation by insurance for disaster related losses; confirm execution of the District or state emergency plan; and certify adherence to cost sharing requirements. Under the declaration process, a joint federal and state (or federal and District) preliminary damage assessment team reviews the damage and incurred emergency costs. In the case of a catastrophic event, the declaration process can be conducted expeditiously.

### **Continuity of Operations (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG)**

A particular concern of the NCR is the continuation of federal government operations through any threat or disaster. This requires flexible and resilient options to address any disaster.

From a continuity of operations and government perspective, FEMA has the responsibility for preparing and implementing the plans and programs of the Federal Government for continuity of operations, continuity of government, and continuity plans. In this role, FEMA directs, monitors and assesses federal agency continuity readiness and capabilities on a regular basis during normal operations and is prepared to monitor and assist during and after a continuity event. Additionally, FEMA provides continuity planning guidance to District, state, local, and tribal governments as a part of the Administration's goal of attaining seamless capabilities and integration across all levels of government. We further share planning guidance and best practices with local governments and assist in their planning and programs to the extent that we are able.

### **2009 – 2010 NCR WINTER STORM PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

During the February 2010 winter storms, federal government operations in the NCR were officially suspended. Federal agencies follow the guidelines of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to ensure the safety of their employees; the decision to close federal government operations in the NCR rests with OPM.

Though not designated a COOP event, many employees were prepared in advance and able to work from home or at alternate operating locations where available in order to continue normal business operations or respond to the event. As noted above, nearly 2,000 employees logged in via official access technology per day, an increase of around 600 per day from the norm during a regular work week. BlackBerry use increased by approximately 142,000 messages per day. In summary, FEMA's business continuity was preserved as a result of robust communications and the spontaneous engagement of dedicated FEMA employees from their homes.

Preparedness actions were also conducted via mutual agreement between FEMA, the states and the District. FEMA was directly apprised of each state and District Emergency Operations

Preparedness is one of the best ways to ensure effective, coordinated, government-wide response. FEMA participates in exercises in the NCR with local, District, state and federal partners to test the preparedness of individual jurisdictions and agencies as well as to identify practices to improve planning and preparedness. For example, during the 2008 Hurricane Season, FEMA held highly successful Pre-Declaration Tabletop Exercises with senior leaders in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, the District, and Pennsylvania to test a new Disaster Assistance Policy. This new policy enables the District and state governments to receive a presidential declaration of emergency in anticipation of a hurricane or other imminent disaster. These exercises were attended by state and District emergency management directors, homeland security advisors, governors' chiefs of staff, senior operations and planning personnel, and senior military advisors.

We have also supported regional catastrophic planning efforts through grant funding, such as the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program. All five of Region III's states and the District have partnered in this \$11 million grant to support six projects: regional public compliance/behavioral analysis, public preparedness, transportation, mass care, resource management, and modeling and simulation.

Most recently, in September 2009, FEMA's Determined Sentry Exercise tested the ability of FEMA's networking system to handle a large number of people (more than a thousand) working off-site. We learned many valuable lessons in that exercise, and we implemented these lessons as we worked during the February 2010 winter storms. The exercise showed that the system could handle the increased number of people working offsite and provided FEMA employees with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the processes for telework. FEMA's Chief Information Officer reports that during the government shutdown, nearly 2,000 employees logged in via official access technology per day, an increase of approximately 600 per day from the norm during a regular work week. BlackBerry use increased by approximately 142,000 messages per day.

### **Incident Response Process**

In January 2008, FEMA released the National Response Framework (NRF), which guides the nation's all-hazards response. It is built upon scalable, flexible, and adaptable coordinating structures to align key roles and responsibilities across the nation, linking all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. It describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from purely local events to large-scale terrorist attacks and catastrophic natural disasters.

At the onset of an incident, the local jurisdiction is always first to respond. However, if an incident overwhelms the local response capabilities, an Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) allows the local entity to request additional assistance. In the NCR, the District is able to request assistance from neighboring states through the EMAC; local communities first request assistance from their state governments, which can, if necessary, request assistance from other states through the EMAC.

Center (EOC) activation plan by way of a FEMA Liaison deployed to each EOC, serving as both the onsite advisor and the direct communication link back to FEMA. FEMA identified availability of staff for potential assignment and placed those personnel on alert.

The National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) Watch at FEMA Headquarters and the Regional Response Coordination Center (RRCC) Watch in Region III, as part of their routine responsibilities, monitored the developing storm situation and preparations in the NCR. A representative from the NCR supported NRCC Watch operations and facilitated information exchange with the NCR. Routine conference calls were conducted with the National Weather Service and between the NRCC, RRCC, and the National Operations Center at DHS headquarters to maintain situational awareness and exchange information both before and after the storm.

The RRCC was led onsite by the Region's senior level response official, with whom I, as the acting regional administrator, was in constant communication. The RRCC included a robust staff of experienced response personnel who provided coverage on a 24-hour basis for the duration of the states' and District's emergency activities.

FEMA Region III hosted several conference calls with state and local officials to discuss the particulars of the storms and to answer questions about FEMA's snow policy. In addition to daily calls with the state emergency management directors, Region III also reached out to the District Mayor's office as well as Baltimore's emergency management director. Secretary Napolitano also spoke with Delaware Governor Jack Markell, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell, West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin, and Washington, D.C., Mayor Adrian Fenty.

Additionally, leading up to the snow storms, FEMA participated in the NCR snow calls convened by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. On these calls, information was shared among regional partners so that decisions with respect to the status of various governments – federal, state and local – could be made with the best available information, including information from the weather service, transportation entities, and others.

### **Current Status of Disaster Recovery Efforts**

As a result of the December 18-20, 2009, winter storms, the President issued major disaster declarations for the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. As part of the President's declarations, Regis Leo Phelan was appointed federal coordinating officer and assumed Disaster Recovery Manager (DRM) authority from the Acting Regional Administrator. As DRM, Mr. Phelan is authorized to manage FEMA's programs and functions in support of the needs identified by the District and the states.

Mr. Phelan has been working closely with the emergency management directors for the District, Virginia, and Maryland. Due to the number of disaster declarations and the need to maintain regional readiness for future events, FEMA staff is embedded in those respective emergency management offices. This collaboration of federal, state, and District staff fosters an efficient and customer-driven environment.

## **District of Columbia**

A major disaster declaration was issued on March 3, approving federal aid in the areas impacted by the snowstorm during December 18 -20. Federal funding is available to the District of Columbia and certain private nonprofit organizations on a cost-sharing basis for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe winter storm and snowstorm. In addition, assistance is available to the District of Columbia on a cost-sharing basis for emergency protective measures, including snow assistance, for a continuous 48-hour period during or proximate to the incident period.

For the February storms, the District's request for a major disaster declaration was received on March 11 and is under review.

## **Maryland**

A major disaster declaration was issued on February 19, approving federal aid in the areas impacted by the snowstorm during December 18-20. Federal funding is available on a cost-sharing basis to state and eligible local governments as well as certain private nonprofit organizations in eight counties. In addition, assistance is available on a cost-sharing basis to these same entities for emergency protective measures, including snow assistance, for a continuous 48-hour period during or proximate to the incident period.

For the February storms, Maryland requested a 30-day extension to request a major disaster declaration. The time extension is approved until April 12, 2010.

## **Virginia**

A major disaster declaration was issued on February 16, approving federal aid in the areas impacted by the snowstorm during December 18 - 20. Federal funding is available on a cost-sharing basis to the Commonwealth and eligible local governments, as well as certain private nonprofit organizations in 31 counties and 9 independent cities, for emergency work and the repair or replacement of facilities damaged by the severe winter storm and snowstorm. In addition, assistance is available on a cost-sharing basis to these same entities for emergency protective measures, including snow assistance, for a continuous 48-hour period during or proximate to the incident period.

For the February storms, the Commonwealth's request for a major disaster declaration was received on March 12 and is under review.

## **Next Steps**

For the disaster declarations issued for the December storms, we are currently working with our partners in the District, Maryland, and Virginia to schedule applicants' briefings -- these are the first step in the public assistance application process. These briefings, which are conducted by

the District and state, are held for representatives of designated city and county governments, as well as qualified non-profit organizations. They explain the application process that District, community and state officials will follow to receive federal disaster assistance.

Additionally, a request for Public Assistance must be filed with the District or state within 30 days after the area is designated eligible for assistance. Following the applicants' briefing, a kickoff meeting is conducted where damages will be discussed and specific needs will be assessed. A combined federal, District, state, and local team then proceeds with project formulation. FEMA reviews and approves project worksheets and obligates the federal share of the costs to the District or state. The District or state then disburses the funds to applicants.

### **Initial Lessons Learned**

We are completing an after action report on the NCR winter storms; after its completion, I will provide you with the lessons learned. A couple of overarching and immediately apparent lessons were reinforced in the snow incidents. First, the most effective means of providing help to those affected is through increasing involvement of local, then state, then federal assistance. If more than local assistance is necessary, a cooperative local, state and federal partnership is the best approach. Second, communications is one of the most important and essential components of effective emergency operations—local, state, and federal entities must have a shared understanding of interoperability and must be cognizant of each other's responsibilities and capabilities. This internal communication among the response community must then lead to external communication that builds public expectation and confidence.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there were elements of the responses to these winter storms that worked well and validated our exercises and tabletops in the NCR. We will continue to review lessons learned and will keep the Congress apprised of our findings.

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to answering your questions.